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January 1995

Vol. 7. No. 1

# EGYPT

## HOSTAGE-TAKING AND INTIMIDATION BY SECURITY FORCES

### SUMMARY

Since 1992, Egypt has faced continuing political violence and a corresponding rise in human rights abuses committed by both government security forces and armed Islamist militants. Shootings and bombings by the military wings of Islamist opposition groups have resulted in the deaths and injury of members of security forces, Egyptian civilians and government officials, and foreigners. The clandestine Islamic Group, an organization that advocates the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt, has claimed responsibility for many of these attacks. The deliberate targeting of civilians violates one of the basic principles of international humanitarian law, and Human Rights Watch condemns in the strongest terms such actions by the Islamic Group.

But human rights abuses by one party in a situation of internal strife never justify violations by another party. Acts of murder and attempted murder committed by armed opposition groups do not give the state a license to abandon the human rights standards that it has pledged to uphold under Egyptian and international law. In disregard of these standards, Egyptian security forces, particularly State Security Investigation (SSI), the internal-security apparatus attached to the Ministry of Interior, have been permitted to operate in a lawless manner. Human rights abuses by these forces include arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, and torture of suspects during interrogation. In 1994, the death in detention of a thirty-year-old Islamist defense lawyer, Abdel Harith Madani, focused international attention on the problem of torture in Egypt.

This report examines one particularly reprehensible security force practice: the detention and intimidation of innocent family members -- including women, children and the elderly -- in order to pressure fugitive relatives to surrender to authorities, frighten families into silence about human rights abuses, and discourage them from pursuing complaints or speaking to journalists and human rights investigators. These actions are part of the arsenal of techniques used by security forces to safeguard their impunity.

The victims of "hostage-taking," the term used by victims and Egyptian lawyers to describe the arrest of family members for the purpose of forcing fugitive relatives to give themselves up, have since 1992 primarily been the relatives of known or suspected Islamist militants who are wanted by authorities on suspicion of carrying out violent crimes against the state. Family members of both sexes and all ages have been targeted and detained:

- In May 1992, security forces detained the relatives of a security suspect who was wanted in connection with the

killing of a police officer in Isna, a town in Upper Egypt. The hostages included the suspect's elderly parents and three of his sisters, aged thirty-five, forty-seven and fifty years old.

- Two boys, nine and twelve years old, were taken hostage in December 1992 when security forces did not find their older brother during a search of the family's apartment in Imbaba in metropolitan Cairo.
- In January 1993, a thirty-one-year-old lecturer at Cairo University was taken hostage at gunpoint in the middle of the night, brought to SSI headquarters, and held there incommunicado for four days. Security forces wanted his younger brother.
- In July 1993, a seventy-year-old woman, ill with diabetes, was taken hostage twice to force the surrender of her fugitive son, who was wanted in connection with the attempted assassination of a security forces operative in Upper Egypt. She was abusively treated and, during the second detention, threatened with rape. Two brothers of the suspect and their wives were also taken hostage. The wives were bound, beaten and threatened with rape.
- In February 1994, the mother, two sisters, brother, and a cousin of a wanted Islamist militant were held incommunicado in Upper Egypt in an attempt to force the suspect to surrender to authorities.

Family members were held with no legal basis. Local authorities typically denied that these individuals were in custody. Since many of the victims were blindfolded and detained incommunicado, it was often difficult if not impossible to ascertain the actual place of detention. One middle-aged hostage from Upper Egypt was set free after fifteen days of incommunicado detention that began in July 1993. He told Human Rights Watch that he had been blindfolded, placed in a vehicle, and then "released" on a road near his town at midnight.

The detention and ill-treatment of female family members is a powerful tool for intimidating communities and coercing the surrender of men to security forces. The threat of rape and the sexually degrading treatment of women are perceived to be profound offenses against a woman's individual honor as well as the honor of her family and male relatives. In societies around the world, including Egypt, men define their honor in part by their ability to protect and control women's reputation for sexual purity. Preying on men's sense of responsibility for their female family members, security forces use mistreatment, particularly sexual mistreatment, of women to pressure fugitives to surrender.

Hostage-taking cannot be dismissed as isolated actions carried out by lawless local officers. The arbitrary and punitive detention of family members in locations as diverse as metropolitan Cairo and towns and villages in Upper Egypt indicates that the practice has become systematic and therefore undoubtedly is sanctioned, if not ordered, at a high level within Egypt's security apparatus.

The replacement in April 1993 of Interior Minister Gen. Abdel Halim Musa with Gen. Hassan el-Alfi did not produce a change in the behavior of security forces, despite public assurances by the new minister in the months following his appointment that hostage-taking and other punitive actions against family members would cease. Since Gen. el-Alfi assumed the helm of the Interior Ministry, innocent family members -- ranging from teenagers to old men and women -- have continued to fall victim to arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, humiliating and abusive treatment, and sometimes torture. Despite this grim reality, the interior minister has held fast to the claim that arbitrary arrests do not occur. "We arrest no one unless he is an activist, a member of an organization," Gen. el-Alfi said in August 1994. "Every detainee was involved in some activity."

### **Threats and Intimidation**

This report also includes information about the use of threats and other forms of intimidation by the security apparatus

to pressure family members into silence and discourage them from speaking out about cases of disappearance, suspicious deaths in detention, possible extrajudicial executions, and excessive use of lethal force. During a fact-finding mission to Egypt in June and July 1994, we found that the intended effect of these tactics had often been achieved. Local lawyers reported, and Human Rights Watch representatives observed, the overwhelming sense of fear -- and in some cases, terror -- that has gripped some family members, ensuring their silence or refusal to speak on the record.

- In a March 1994 case -- involving the killing in Upper Egypt of three suspects whom local lawyers claimed were in security forces custody -- the sudden appearance of an SSI officer forced the family of one of the victims into silence during a meeting with an investigator from the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR). A local prosecutor also apparently was so afraid of this officer that he too declined to speak with the EOHR representative when the officer arrived at a meeting between the prosecutor and the human rights investigator.
- There was a possible cover-up by authorities of the use of excessive force by security forces in March 1994, claiming the lives of four civilians in Upper Egypt. At least one eyewitness was threatened in order to force him to refrain from discussing the incident, and the home of the family of one of the victims was surrounded by security forces when EOHR representatives arrived for an interview. The presence of the local police chief inside the family's home made it impossible for relatives to speak openly with the EOHR delegation.
- There was a clear pattern of harassment and intimidation of the family of thirty-year-old Islamist lawyer Abdel Harith Madani, who died in custody in Cairo in April 1994, one day after his arrest by SSI officers. Madani's relatives in Cairo were detained, in a successful effort to pressure the family into quickly accepting the body for immediate burial, despite strong suspicions by lawyers and others that the outspoken attorney's death was due to torture under interrogation. After the burial in Madani's home village, the family there was placed under surveillance and harassed by security forces, in an attempt to force their silence about the case.

### **A Climate of Fear**

In the climate of fear and ubiquitous surveillance that prevails in particular in Upper Egypt, over a three-year period Human Rights Watch found that documentation of hostage-taking was difficult. Some families were simply too afraid and could not be approached to provide testimony. One attorney in Assiut in Upper Egypt who was familiar with individual cases told Human Rights Watch in 1993 that family members would not come forward to provide testimony: "People are afraid, especially if their relatives are members of the Islamic Group." A lawyer from a town south of Assiut expressed a similar view in 1994. He had described to Human Rights Watch representatives how five members of one family were held incommunicado to put pressure on a fugitive relative, a university graduate who was a member of the Islamic Group, to turn himself in. The lawyer indicated that it was not possible to arrange interviews with the relatives. "They'll be scared. There is pressure on them. They are afraid of SSI. They were tortured," he explained.

Victims whom we did meet, also afraid, were reluctant to provide details and consent to publication of their names and testimony, for fear of additional harassment from security forces. Throughout this report, we have withheld names, places of residence and other details in order to protect the identities of vulnerable individuals and their families.

In addition, extensive surveillance of the movements of Human Rights Watch investigators by plainclothes security agents in Upper Egypt in June 1994 hampered the delegation's ability to visit and interview families and collect testimonial information about alleged abuses that occurred in 1994.<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch was forced to curtail contact with families so as not to place these vulnerable individuals at risk of further harassment or punitive action by local security forces.

### **A Breakdown in the Rule of Law**

Hostage-taking is only one manifestation of the pervasive and ongoing problem of arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention in Egypt. Lawyers interviewed by Human Rights Watch registered uniform frustration at the inaction of local prosecutors in the face of such abuses, arguing that there is no effective oversight of police and security forces conduct. "Prosecutors just ignore us. The prosecutor's office here has become part of the police," said one lawyer from Upper Egypt who has complained to authorities about the illegal, unrecorded detention of family members in his area. "Today, no citizen is safe in his own house."

A human rights lawyer in Cairo emphasized that families too are well aware of this problem: "It is the duty of the prosecutor to protect the families from harassment, intimidation, threats. Families are afraid because the prosecutor provides no protection against SSI. I have encountered this problem of fear when I meet with families." Another Cairo-based lawyer agreed: "If the prosecutors were independent and carried out real investigations, this would not happen. The attitudes of the police and the prosecutors are identical." Other lawyers interviewed by Human Rights Watch expressed similar views. They concurred that Egypt's prosecutorial system lacks independence and is thoroughly compromised and functions, in effect, as an arm of police and security forces.

Many lawyers believe that this breakdown in the rule of law has its origins at the top. These attorneys exhibited a profound lack of confidence in Prosecutor General Ragaa el-Araby, and bitterly complained that he has not properly discharged one of the key duties of his office -- independent investigation of abuses and prosecution of abusers. This lack of will to hold accountable state agents, lawyers say, permeates the entire system, influences the behavior of prosecutors at the local level, and allows security forces to operate with impunity, in defiance of the law and the Egyptian government's obligations under international human rights treaties. "The entire institution is not independent, and el-Araby is the symbol," is the way one Cairo-based human rights lawyer put it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The taking of family members hostage is an egregious human rights abuse. The suffering that this practice has caused to children and other innocent relatives, especially the elderly, is unconscionable. The severity of the abuse is compounded when family members are held in incommunicado detention, tortured, subjected to other forms of physical mistreatment, threatened with physical violence, and humiliated.

Human Rights Watch calls upon the Egyptian government to take immediate action to put a stop to these practices. Investigations must be undertaken to hold accountable those members of the security forces who have targeted, detained, and sometimes tortured the relatives of security suspects. The government must take steps to demonstrate the will of local law enforcement authorities to investigate thoroughly and prosecute all offenders so that lawyers and family members have full confidence to report incidents of future abuse -- without the fear of retaliation from local security forces.

It is also essential that the Egyptian government take immediate steps to end incommunicado detention, and to institute effective oversight of security forces practices. It is particularly important that thorough and impartial investigations be carried out in all cases of suspicious deaths, including deaths in custody and shooting deaths, and that all forms of intimidation of families and witnesses by security forces cease. We therefore strongly urge the Egyptian government to adhere to the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council on May 24, 1989. These principles include the following:

-- "Governments shall ensure that persons deprived of their liberty are held in officially recognized places of custody, and that accurate information on their custody and whereabouts, including transfers, is made promptly available to their relatives and lawyer or other persons of confidence." (Principle 6)

-- "There shall be a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death in the above circumstances." (Principle 9)

-- "In cases in which the established investigative procedures are inadequate because of lack of expertise or impartiality, because of the importance of the matter or because of the apparent existence of a pattern of abuses, and in cases where there are complaints from the family of the victim about these inadequacies or other substantial reasons, Governments shall pursue investigations through an independent commission of inquiry or similar procedure. Members of such a commission shall be chosen for their recognized impartiality, competence and independence as individuals. In particular, they shall be independent of any institution, agency or person that may be the subject of the inquiry. The commission shall have the authority to obtain all information necessary to the inquiry and shall conduct the inquiry as provided under these Principles." (Principle 11)

-- "The body of the deceased person shall not be disposed of until an adequate autopsy is conducted by a physician, who shall, if possible, be an expert in forensic pathology. Those conducting the autopsy shall have the right of access to all investigative data, to the place where the body was discovered, and to the place where the death is thought to have occurred. If the body has been buried and it later appears that an investigation is required, the body shall be promptly and competently exhumed for an autopsy." (Principle 12)

-- "The body of the deceased shall be available to those conducting the autopsy for a sufficient amount of time to enable a thorough investigation to be carried out. The autopsy shall, at minimum, attempt to establish the identity of the deceased and the cause and manner of death. The time and place of death shall also be determined to the extent possible. Detailed color photographs of the deceased shall be included in the autopsy report in order to document and support the findings of the investigation. The autopsy report must describe any and all injuries to the deceased including any evidence of torture." (Principle 13)

-- "In order to ensure objective results, those conducting the autopsy must be able to function impartially and independently of any potentially implicated persons or organizations or entities." (Principle 14)

-- "Complainants, witnesses, those conducting the investigation and their families shall be protected from violence, threats of violence or any other form of intimidation. Those potentially implicated in extra-legal, arbitrary or summary executions shall be removed from any position of control or power, whether direct or indirect, over complainants, witnesses and their families, as well as over those conducting investigations." (Principle 15)

-- "Families of the deceased and their legal representatives shall be informed of, and have access to, any hearing as well as to all information relevant to the investigation, and shall be entitled to present other evidence. The family of the deceased shall have the right to insist that a medical or other qualified representative be present at the autopsy. When the identity of a deceased person has been determined, a notification of death shall be posted, and the family or relatives of the deceased immediately informed. The body of the deceased shall be returned to them upon completion of the investigation." (Principle 16)

-- "A written report shall be made within a reasonable period of time on the methods and findings of such investigations. The report shall be made public immediately and shall include the scope of the inquiry, procedures and methods used to evaluate evidence as well as conclusions and recommendations based on findings of fact and on applicable law. The report shall also describe in detail specific events that were found to have occurred, and the evidence upon which such findings were based, and list the names of witnesses who testified, with the exception of those whose identities have been withheld for their own protection. The Government shall, within a reasonable period of time, either reply to the report of the investigation, or indicate the steps to be taken in response to it." (Principle 17)

Human Rights Watch also calls upon the governments of the United States, the European Union, Japan and other concerned states to initiate effective and vigorous diplomatic action, including public statements, to denounce the practice of hostage-taking, and to urge the Egyptian authorities to bring it to an end immediately.

\* \* \*

### 1. HOSTAGE-TAKING ON A WIDE SCALE: 1992

*"If they cannot find a suspect, they take his family. This is the policy of the regime."*

*-- Egyptian lawyer, Fayoum, July 1994.*

*"Many people left the village. There was total fear."*

*-- Lawyer describing the atmosphere in Mat'ana in Upper Egypt following arrests of family members and a siege by security forces beginning in April 1992.*

Human Rights Watch/Middle East has collected information about cases of detention of innocent family members by security forces that date back to 1990.<sup>2</sup> These incidents have occurred in major cities, including Cairo, and in towns and villages throughout the country.

In 1990, for example, a fifty-three year-old mother of seven was detained for six days at the local police station in Minya, a city south of Cairo. She was held because her sons were suspected of involvement with militant Islamist groups. "I was a hostage," she told us. "They did this to me because they wanted my son Hamdi, who was not yet sixteen years old. My son Sayyid came to visit me on the fourth day of my detention. They took him to SSI and beat him and then detained him for six months....It was all done to threaten us. They told me that my sons should not have contact with Islamic groups."<sup>3</sup>

In October 1991 in a small village near Tanta, a city northeast of Cairo, two brothers of a mathematics teacher wanted by SSI for questioning were arrested until he turned himself in. "They threatend my fiance," the teacher said in an interview with Human Rights Watch, adding that security forces "stayed for four days at the entrances of the village, terrorizing people."<sup>4</sup>

Two months later, in Domyat, on the northeast Mediterranean coast, relatives of suspects were detained following an attack that wounded security officer Maj. Mutawwi Abu al-Naja. According to the written report of a local lawyer, security forces in December 1991 "went on a rampage" in the village of al-Wasil after the attack, raiding houses and rounding up many youths. "If they entered a house and did not find anyone they wanted," the lawyer wrote, "then they would...arrest whomever theyfound -- a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter, and would hold them as hostages until [the suspect] surrendered himself."<sup>5</sup>

Hostage-taking and other forms of pressure on families increased in 1992, when authorities began an all-out crackdown on militant Islamists. As political violence mounted in Upper Egypt that year -- with police and security forces, Christians and tourists attacked by armed Islamists -- families of those suspected of involvement in this violence were increasingly targeted.

"It is now policy to take family members hostage," one Cairo defense lawyer told Human Rights Watch. According to the lawyer, many family members, including women, were detained in Upper Egypt beginning in April 1992: "In two

months, we submitted seventy letters of complaint about detentions, from Qena governorate alone, to the Prosecutor General." He said that of these seventy complaints, about forty were cases of family members who had been taken to put pressure on their wanted relatives to turn themselves in. The hostages were detained at various police and security forces facilities throughout the governorate. "This is only one example. It has happened in many other places," the lawyer said.<sup>6</sup> Incidents reported by the Cairo-based Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) and lawyers interviewed by Human Rights Watch are described below.

### **Wives Stripped Naked**

Hostage-taking in the oasis city of Fayoum, southwest of Cairo, followed the killing of an SSI officer there on March 3, 1992. According to EOHR, el- Azab prison and the paramilitary Central Security Forces camp located fifteen kilometers from Fayoum were used "to detain the relatives of [wanted] suspects for periods that ranged between twenty-four hours and ten days, during which they were exposed to extensive doses of torture to give information about the hiding places of the fugitives....Methods of torture used in the camp have included stripping the wives of fugitives naked and placing them in a closed room with naked male detainees."<sup>7</sup>

### **Children and Elderly Relatives Detained**

On April 28, 1992, forty-year-old police officer Mukhtar Ahmad Dawud was shot dead in an ambush in Isna, in Upper Egypt, as he was riding home on his motorcycle. After the officer's killing, security forces laid siege to Mat`ana, a village just north of Isna, and took hostages, "starting with the heads of every big family, old men, sixty and seventy years old," according to a lawyer from the area. "Then they came back and took the women, about fifteen of them, old and young." He said that the women were insulted and cursed, kicked in the legs, and spat upon if they asked to use a bathroom. The lawyer said that the leader of the Islamic Group in nearby Qena intervened with local police officials and the women were released. "When senior police heard about this, they were furious," he said, "and they started collecting the children." About twenty boys, aged fifteen and sixteen, were detained and held at Isna police station for six weeks as the search for suspects continued. "They were held with no legal basis whatsoever," the lawyer emphasized.<sup>8</sup>

One of the suspects in the killing of the officer was Salah Madani of Mat`ana, who eventually was arrested in Alexandria in May 1992.<sup>9</sup> Prior to his arrest, his elderly, frail father and two of his brothers, Abdel Hadi, now thirty-three years old, and Bakri, forty, were detained for one month. Fifteen women family members were also detained, and held for one day. These included Madani's mother, who is in her seventies; his three sisters, fifty-year-old Fawzia, forty-seven-year-old Farhana, and thirty-five-year-old Na`mat, and Adiyah, a sixty-year-old niece. Ten other male relatives were detained, ranging in age from an eighteen-year-old nephew to a fifty-year-old cousin.

At the time of the hostage-taking, the village was filled with troops and officers from the paramilitary Central Security Forces and SSI. "They were headquartered in Luxor or Qena, and they stayed for two months. Officers occupied the houses and demanded food. The women started preparing group meals," the lawyer from the area told Human Rights Watch. "They prevented people from working the fields because they were afraid they would bring food to those in hiding. Many people left the village. There was total fear."<sup>10</sup>

### **Beating and Torture of Hostages**

According to local lawyers interviewed by Human Rights Watch, scores of relatives of suspects were arrested in and around Dayrut, a town north of Assiut in Upper Egypt, following a massive crackdown that began on June 20, 1992, after members of the Islamic Group killed at least two policemen and two Christians there.<sup>11</sup> Reuter reported on June 24 that "armored vehicles backed by some 5,000 policemen" had been dispatched to the areas around Dayrut, and that

security sources said that "[s]pecial anti-terrorist units stormed houses suspected of housing militants."

One lawyer told Human Rights Watch that family members were taken hostage in the raids, and brought to Central Security Forces camps or the police station in Dayrut: "Some of them were tortured. In some cases, the heads of families were gathered in the center of a village and beaten with sticks and whips." He said that relatives were told to look for the wanted suspects, and to keep the police informed of their efforts.

The lawyer added that collective punishment was meted out by security forces. As part of the operation around Dayrut and its surrounding villages, on June 23, 1992, the village of Masarah was surrounded and troops searched for suspected members of the Islamic Group:

They removed the belongings from four houses and piled them in the street, then poured gasoline on the piles and burned everything. These were the houses of the families of Abdallah Amin Meghawi, Jamail Abdul Hamid Abdul Nasr, Ahmad Zaki Ahmad and Ali Abdul Rahim Hassan [suspected members of the Islamic Group].<sup>12</sup>

### **Women and Old Men Detained and Threatened**

Also beginning in June 1992 there was a large security forces presence in Qena city and its village of Homeidat, in an apparent all-out effort to apprehend eight Islamic Group leaders and other members of the organization. "They entered Homeidat houses late at night, even though they knew that the wanted people were not there. This is a family village, and they deliberately created tension and nervousness among the people," a local lawyer told Human Rights Watch. He continued:

For each wanted person, they took ten or more family members, including women and old men. They were brought to the Qena police station, the [paramilitary] Central Security Forces camp near Qena, and to secret places. Most were released after two days, but some were held for as long as a week. They were threatened, and told that they would be left alone if they surrendered their relatives. Not less than 250 hostages were taken in June.<sup>13</sup>

The tactics used by security forces, including collective punishment, left local residents terrified. "In and around Homeidat and Hujayrat [another nearby village], they would go into the fields thought to be hiding places and shoot over large areas, up to [100 acres]," the lawyer said. He added that small mud houses of residents were destroyed, including houses in Hujayrat that were home to the families of wanted suspects. "These houses were huts -- the weakest of kicks would destroy them, making the ceilings fall in. They would also destroy property inside the houses," he added. Another lawyer from Qena pointed out the impact that these raids had on local residents:

You have to realize that life here is very difficult and the standard of living is low. The people, who have witnessed a large number of detentions since 1992, are very afraid. Even educated people are afraid.

Citing the local council elections that were held in November 1992, the lawyer said: "Residents literally were too afraid to go to the police station to get their voter cards. They have fear because of what they have seen and what they have heard."<sup>14</sup>

### **Brothers and Fathers Detained**

A lawyer from Upper Egypt told Human Rights Watch that he was one of the hostages taken by SSI during a mass arrest in his town in 1992. He said that security forces arrived at his house at two or three in the morning. He was brought to a paramilitary camp in Qena, and held there for seven days. "There were about fifty other people with me.

About ten or fifteen of us were hostages," he said.

He said that he and seven or eight others were brothers of known or suspected members of the Islamic Group, and three or four were fathers as old as sixty. He said that all of the detainees were blindfolded for two days. "Most were beaten but I was not," he added. He said that his twenty-three-year-old younger brother, who was taken with him, was tortured. The lawyer noted that this brother, and another younger brother who was detained two months later, continue to be held without charge -- one in Tora Istiqbal prison and the other in Abu Za'bal Sinai prison -- despite repeated court orders to release them.<sup>15</sup>

### **Cairo: Women and Children Taken Hostage**

In December 1992, family members were taken hostage when a massive number of security forces<sup>16</sup> moved in on Imbaba, the densely populated Cairo slum where Islamist militants maintained a strong and visible presence. EOHR, in a report describing the human rights abuses that accompanied the operation that began on December 8, 1992, noted that at first "the citizens welcomed the interference, hoping to be rid of the...oppression practiced on them by the Islamic Group in Imbaba. But after two months...the slogan most popular was: 'The hell of the Muslim groups is better than the police's heaven.'" <sup>17</sup> EOHR cited hostage-taking as one of the abuses carried out by security forces, in addition to mass arbitrary arrests, temporary disappearances, widespread torture, and the death in detention from torture of twenty-three-year-old Ahmad Hamido al-Sawi.<sup>18</sup>

EOHR reported that wives, mothers and sisters of wanted suspects were detained and, in some cases, tortured.<sup>19</sup> Among the hostages were young children. Two boys, nine and twelve years old, were taken from their apartment on December 28 by security forces searching for their older brother. The twelve-year-old testified about his treatment at the local police station:

[T]he soldiers held the soles of my feet upwards in a contraption they call the *falaqa* and beat me on the soles. Then they asked me to jog around the place so that my soles would not swell. When they were through, they put me in a room and closed the door, despite my screaming for I did not know where they had taken my younger brother, and I slept on the tiles in the cold.<sup>20</sup>

After their older brother was apprehended, the two boys were forced to watch him being tortured. The nine-year-old told EOHR: "I saw my brother bleeding from the mouth and he couldn't stand on his feet, an officer was beating him with a piece of wood."<sup>21</sup>

## **2. THE PRACTICE CONTINUES: 1993-1994**

*"The mother was tied with her hands behind her back. They threatened to rape her if her [wanted] son did not show up in two days."*

*-- A case of hostage-taking in a town in Upper Egypt in 1993, described by a local lawyer.*

*"We arrest no one unless he is an activist, a member of an organization. Every detainee was involved in some activity."*

*--Interior Minister Hassan el-Alfi, August 1994.*

Hostage-taking continued in 1993 and 1994. Parents, brothers, sisters and other relatives of wanted security suspects

were detained. Armed security forces stormed homes in the middle of the night to carry out arrests. Victims were typically blindfolded, transported to unknown locations and held incommunicado, with no official record of the place of detention or the custodial chain of command. Complaints by lawyers to local prosecutors and security authorities about these arrests had no effect.

Although government ministries and local authorities publicly denied that hostage-taking was a practice of security forces, there have been unofficial admissions that hostages were in fact in custody. In one case, SSI conceded to a Cairo defense lawyer that the condition for the release of two of his clients was their brother's surrender to authorities. In another case, local elected officials in a town in Upper Egypt served as intermediaries between SSI and one beleaguered family to negotiate the surrender of a fugitive whose mother and two brothers were being held hostage.

Cases of hostage-taking from 1993-1994 are presented below in chronological order.

### **Cairo University Instructor Held Incommunicado for Four Days**

In January 1993, a thirty-one-year-old academic, Muhammed Salaheddin Hassan Hanafi, was detained by security forces who were looking for his twenty-seven-year-old brother. Hanafi was held incommunicado for four days in SSI custody and abusively treated. His family's house in the M'aadi section of Cairo was raided at approximately 4:00 a.m. on January 22, 1993. Hanafi, an assistant lecturer in the department of sociology at Cairo University, described his ordeal to Human Rights Watch:

I woke up with a pistol at my head. There were ten soldiers and officers in my room. They asked about my brother and I told them that he was not home. An officer smacked me in the face and started to insult me. The soldiers started to tear apart my bookshelves, the mattress of my bed. They stole money from my drawers. They took my papers, notes from my thesis, and about 225 books, all of them concerning the Islamic groups in Egypt.<sup>22</sup> I told them that I was a member of the university and what they were doing was wrong.

Hanafi said that while he was being cursed, one soldier had a gun pointed at his mother. He was asked who lived upstairs, and he told them that his cousin occupied the apartment. "They went up, broke down the door, and beat my cousin, who has a short beard, and threatened his wife. They took their four-year-old son, who had chicken pox, with them as they moved from room to room. They took books on religion that my cousin had brought back from Saudi Arabia."

Hanafi and his cousin were detained; his cousin was blindfolded but Hanafi was not. He said that there were hundreds of soldiers on the street and six large vehicles filled with detainees. He noticed that the SSI officers left in a civilian car. Hanafi was held in a vehicle with about thirty soldiers.

One of them tried to blindfold me, and I refused. Later, an officer reprimanded the soldier for not blindfolding me. I was ordered to take off my clothes and I was blindfolded. I was punched in the stomach when I said that I was a university professor. Someone said: "I'll show you how we deal with university professors when we go inside." I was hit on the back of my head, they would call me "professor," and then hit me again.

Hanafi was brought to SSI's Cairo headquarters, and sat on the floor in a hallway, with a group of about forty other detainees, from 7:00 in the morning until 1:00 in the afternoon. He was taken for interrogation blindfolded. His interrogators told him that SSI had information that he was a member of the Jihad Organization<sup>23</sup> and that incriminating materials had been removed from his house. He was threatened with fifteen days of detention. He was asked why he had selected his thesis topic and from whom he had obtained his information. Hanafi also was asked why suspects interrogated by SSI had mentioned his brother's name.

He was held for thirty-five hours "with no water, no food, no blankets. When they would leave the room, they would turn the air conditioner on high." Detainees were taken to the bathroom in groups of fifteen, "all of us in the bathroom at the same time, for a total of ten minutes." He said that during the four days he was held, he was verbally abused and had no sleep. For five-hour periods each day, "I would be picked up from my seat violently, and forced to stand for a half-hour while the air conditioner was on. This was repeated over and over."

On January 25, Hanafi was brought to an officer's room and his blindfold was removed. "The officer, Lt. Omar Sa'dani, showed me a photograph and asked if the person had given me information for my thesis. I said that I didn't know him. Then he showed me a series of photographs, and I recognized one person." Hanafi was blindfolded again, removed from the office, but brought back again at midnight. "The officer apologized to me and said that they were following procedures. He told me not to tell my university. He said that there were two conditions for my release. Either I should leave and return with my brother, or I should call a telephone number, which he gave me, if my brother showed up," he said.<sup>24</sup> Hanafi was released just after midnight. He reported the incident to Cairo University, which already had issued a press release on his behalf while he was held incommunicado.<sup>25</sup>

### **Other Cases of Hostage-Taking in Cairo**

Egyptian lawyers told Human Rights Watch about other cases of arrest and incommunicado detention of the brothers of wanted suspects that occurred in Cairo in early 1993. According to defense attorney Montasser al-Zayyat,<sup>26</sup> thirty-year-old Abdullah Muhammed Salem and twenty-two-year-old Eissam Muhammed Salem were arrested on January 25 and January 23, 1993, respectively, and detained at the SSI office in Giza -- in the southwest of metropolitan Cairo -- because security forces wanted their brother Magdi. Al-Zayyat said that SSI admitted to him that if Magdi surrendered to the authorities, his two brothers would be released. Al-Zayyat told Human Rights Watch that he had presented written complaints about both detentions to the prosecutor general.<sup>27</sup>

Another Cairo defense lawyer reported to Human Rights Watch that on April 20, 1993, at approximately 3:00 A.M., security forces raided the apartment of Muhammed Azab Abdul Khader in the Shobra district of Cairo. Abdul Khader was wanted for affiliation with the Islamic Group. He was not at home at the time of the raid, and his twenty-four-year-old brother Hussein was taken. "As of April 28, no prison in Egypt reported receiving Hussein," the lawyer said, indicating that his client most likely was being held incommunicado in SSI custody.<sup>28</sup>

### **April 1993: Interior Minister Replaced, But Abuses Continue**

On April 18, 1993, Interior Minister Gen. Muhammed Abdel Halim Moussa was sacked by President Mubarak, and replaced by Maj. Gen. Hassan el-Alfi, then-governor of Assyut province in Upper Egypt. The new interior minister's guidelines reportedly stated that security forces may not take hostage the relatives of suspects wanted by the authorities.<sup>29</sup> He affirmed this publicly in an interview in May 1993. When asked by chief editor Makram Muhammed Ahmad if the wives of all the detainees had been released, the interior minister replied:

My instructions are that inhumane and illegal actions should never take place. When we have to take action against someone because he erred we should not penalize his wife or any other member of his family.<sup>30</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cited the interior minister's commitments in a June 1993 document that it sent to Human Rights Watch. It noted that "Hassan el-Alfi, immediately upon his appointment on April 18, 1993, stated that the security forces have not and will not arrest the relatives of any suspects in cases of terrorism as a means of applying pressure on them to turn themselves over to justice."<sup>31</sup> Despite these public assertions, the practice of hostage-taking and harassment of families by security forces has continued under Gen. el-Alfi's tenure.

"Everyone is scared. This is a police state," said a secular lawyer who lives in a town of 20,000 in Upper Egypt where hostage-taking occurred in 1993 -- after Gen. el-Alfi assumed the post of interior minister -- and again in 1994. He added that when family members are released from detention, they are "destroyed, exhausted, and humiliated."<sup>32</sup>

### **Brothers Taken Hostage, Wives Threatened with Rape**

A middle-aged professional from a town in Upper Egypt was detained in July 1993 --along with other family members -- to pressure his fugitive younger brother, who was wanted in connection with the attempted assassination of a member of the security forces, to turn himself in. The man was too afraid to consent to the use of his name or his testimony. He also was so visibly traumatized by his experience, and that of women family members taken hostage, including his wife and mother, that he was unable to recount the full details of what had happened. "I do not want any more pain," he said quietly.<sup>33</sup>

A local lawyer familiar with the family's case provided information about the tactics used by SSI to force the surrender of the man's brother Sami.<sup>34</sup> According to the lawyer, the first hostage taken was Sami's seventy-year-old mother, who suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure. She was bound at the wrists and continuously blindfolded. "They kept her for fifteen days and no one knew where she was," the lawyer said. He described the woman as a physical and emotional "wreck" from her ordeal.

"After she was released, they started putting pressure on the family to bring in [Sami]," the lawyer said, "but the family did not know where he was hiding." Sami's three older brothers were then taken hostage and held incommunicado for fifteen days. One of them described how security forces came to his home in the middle of the night:

At 2:30 in the morning, I was surprised by a force storming my house. Three trucks surrounded the building, and there were many soldiers in black uniforms, armed with machine guns. I opened the door. Two of them grabbed me, put me in a vehicle, and took me to the local police station. Then they blindfolded me and took me somewhere. No one spoke to me. I was extremely annoyed because I had no change of clothes and no shoes. We entered a building and they left me in a small room with two small windows.

He was held in this room for fifteen days with another resident of his town and the man's son; they too had been taken hostage to force the surrender of a fugitive relative. "We had to pay a soldier to bring us food. We had to knock for permission to go to the bathroom. They never asked us any questions," he said. At the end of the two-week period, two officers --whom he assumed were from SSI -- entered the room and told the men that they were being released because local politicians had intervened. They were brought blindfolded to a car and deposited at midnight on a road near their town.

The lawyer told Human Rights Watch that two of the brothers were detained again a week later, along with their wives. He said that the women were blindfolded, bound, slapped, beaten with a heavy leather whip,<sup>35</sup> and threatened with rape. The wives were held for one day and then released. But the pressure on the brothers continued because their mother was again taken hostage as well as the eldest son of one of them, a high school student, who was tortured.<sup>36</sup>

According to the lawyer, the mother was tied with her hands behind her back and her clothes were torn off in front of her sons. "They threatened that she would be raped if [Sami] did not show up in forty-eight hours," the lawyer said.<sup>37</sup> "During this period, there were negotiations between SSI and members of the city council, who played an intermediary role between SSI and the family. The negotiations took five days, not forty-eight hours," he added. The hostages were released when Sami surrendered to authorities.

The lawyer noted that security authorities had earlier successfully employed hostage-taking to effect the surrender of

another suspect in the same case. The suspect's father had been detained for one month and released, and then held for ten days and again released. When the man was taken hostage for a third time, his son turned himself in a week later and the father was set free.

### **Father Detained and Beaten; Women Relatives Threatened with Rape**

In August 1993, fourteen family members of wanted security suspect Ahmed Farouq Ahmed Ali were taken hostage in Cairo. Before Farouq's surrender to authorities, the relatives were subjected to brutal treatment by security forces seeking information about his whereabouts and trying to force his surrender. Farouq's father was beaten after security forces broke down the doors of his home in Giza on August 20. According to EOHR:

He was then taken to SSI headquarters in Giza, where he was subjected to severe beating on all parts of his body while being tied feet and hands, and also the officers threatened to sexually assault him, his wife, sisters and daughter-in-law. The father further stated that the officers beat his wife in front of him and hit her head on the wall. The representatives of EOHR noted several wounds and bruises on the scalp of the wife.<sup>38</sup>

Farouq was arrested on September 3, 1993, and died in custody one day later.<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch wrote to President Mubarak about this case, and requested that an investigation be conducted not only into the circumstances of Farouq's death but also into the detention and mistreatment of his relatives. The letter, dated September 30, 1993, was never answered.

Farouq's father was released the day his son died. EOHR reported that the father was told by an officer that Farouq had died of a heart attack during investigation, and "was ordered to commit to silence and to endorse a statement that his son died naturally."<sup>40</sup> The family was forced to bury the body secretly, according to EOHR, and funeral ceremonies were not allowed.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mass Arrests and Torture in a Village**

EOHR also reported that in December 1993 forty men, women and children from the village of el-Zaidiya, Oseem, in Giza governorate, were detained illegally in order to obtain information about the whereabouts of individuals wanted by authorities on charges of murder. These citizens, ranging in age from three to sixty years old, were held in the police station from December 5 to December 13, 1993, and tortured:

[T]hey were beaten with sticks and rubber hoses, kicked all over their bodies, scorched with fire, had live cigarettes stubbed out on their bodies, electrocuted, dragged over the ground with their hands bound, doused in cold water and suspended from doors.

The detainees were never presented to the prosecutor for questioning and the police station maintained no record of their presence during the time of detention.<sup>42</sup>

### **Mother, Sisters, and Older Brother Taken Hostage**

In February 1994, family members in a town in Upper Egypt were detained to pressure Tareq, a member of the Islamic Group who was wanted in connection with the attempted assassination of a local security operative in 1993, to surrender to authorities.<sup>43</sup> According to a loca